

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 62 | Number 2 (Spring 2003)

pps. 260-261

Moving Out: a Nebraska Woman's Life

Barbara J. Steinson

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2003 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

Steinson, Barbara J. "Moving Out: a Nebraska Woman's Life." *The Annals of Iowa* 62 (2003), 260-261.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10695>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Martin—of aging and the emotional toll of dealing with his sons' personal scandals than with the increasing irrelevance of his message.

What is most striking about *Hero of the Heartland* is Martin's ability to note Sunday's shortcomings—his intolerance, chauvinism, materialism, and more—while at the same time persuasively arguing that we should understand the revivalist as a psychologically fragile man who never escaped the trauma of his Iowa childhood. Critical yet sympathetic: just what one hopes for in a biographer.

Robert F. Martin won the 2003 Benjamin F. Shambaugh Award for *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society, 1862–1935*. With this award, the State Historical Society of Iowa recognizes the most significant book on Iowa history published each year.—Ed.

Moving Out: A Nebraska Woman's Life, by Polly Spence, edited by Karl Spence Richardson. Women in the West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 280 pp. Illustrations. \$17.95 paper.

Reviewer Barbara J. Steinson is professor of history at DePauw University. She is the author of several articles about rural women in the twentieth century.

The autobiography of Polly Spence (1914–1998) provides illuminating contrasts between small-town life in south-central Nebraska and in the rugged northwestern corner of the state, which bears little similarity to neighboring prairie states.

Spence's childhood memories include compelling accounts of Klan organizing in Franklin and resistance by her father (the town's newspaper editor), exchanging goods and services with merchants for advertising and subscriptions, solving financial problems by moving into cheaper housing, and burning anger at her often critical mother.

Their move to Crawford in 1929 landed them in a western town marked by a different "tempo and texture of life," with "loose and relaxed attitudes" of "live and let live" (78). Nearby Fort Robinson provided entertainment and an earnest suitor, whom Spence spurned for the University of Nebraska. Her amusing life as a sorority girl in the early 1930s ended before she completed a full semester. Back in Crawford, Spence fell in love and married a rancher. Reflecting on their early marriage, Spence recalls "working hard and trying our damndest," but "each year we went deeper in debt" (130). Spence's account of motherhood is fairly brief, but she details the crushing im-

fact of the death of her youngest son and the consequences for her middle child: "I'd do anything in the world for Spence—except pay attention to him, listen to him, . . . give love he longed for" (160).

Self-doubts and marital difficulties are pervasive in later chapters, but Spence's strength of character shines through her actions: turning the ranch into lodging for tourists and hunters, clearing out many debts, realizing "I'd hung onto the rotting carcass of a marriage for twenty years after it had died," and moving to California in her fifties (201). Her anger, which comes out in raw and powerful ways, reflects a recognition that living for others is often not living at all.

Letters from the Dust Bowl, by Caroline Henderson, edited by Alvin O. Turner. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001. xv, 278 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Roger Bromert is professor of history at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. His research and writing have focused on the Sioux and the New Deal.

When Caroline Boa accepted a teaching job at the Center School near Eva, Oklahoma, in 1907, she also established a claim on a quarter-section of land across the road. The following year she married Will Henderson. For nearly 60 years the couple farmed the homestead in the Oklahoma Panhandle. During those years, in letters, essays, and articles, Caroline Henderson penned firsthand accounts about farm life on the Great Plains. Alvin Turner has edited those writings into a fascinating account of hope and hardships.

Caroline Henderson was not an ordinary homesteader, plains-person, or farm wife. She earned a degree in literature from Mount Holyoke College, taught English and Latin in the Des Moines public schools, and later earned a master's degree in literature from the University of Kansas. Her articles on the farmer's plight during the depression and Dust Bowl were published in *Atlantic Monthly* and *Ladies World*. To friends and relatives she wrote of her and Will Henderson's love for books, the coming of modern conveniences such as the telephone, electricity, and indoor plumbing, and the virtues of democracy over totalitarian rule. There are also discussions of religion, education, children, gardening, politics, and New Deal federal programs.

Most of the writings center on farm and livestock production and on the Hendersons' determination to remain on the homestead despite the hardships of drought, wind, dust, blizzards, and isolation. She writes to her daughter Eleanor of the economic importance of the turkeys she raised and the eggs she sold to supplement the family income

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.